

CHAPTER 7.0 Life at Ladd Field

The airbase at Ladd Field brought thousands of newcomers into the frontier community of Fairbanks, which in 1940 was a small remote town of only a few thousand people. The base had to provide housing, food, equipment, and recreation for this new influx of military and civilian people. As the airfield grew from its own frontier beginnings as a small air station, so did many aspects of life at Ladd Field.



Figure 62. Junior officers' cabin, ca 1940-1941. This cabin was lost to fire in February 1941. Courtesy Richard Dennison.

Military Quarters

The original design for Ladd Field called for a small permanent garrison, with quarters provided near the airfield for officers, NCOs, and Air Corps enlisted men. These buildings of reinforced concrete and steel were designed for peacetime construction, when labor, materials, and time were more plentiful than they would be after the onset of war. These permanent buildings could take up to two years to construct.

Consequently, when Gen. Arnold ordered Ladd Field to begin operations ahead of schedule in September 1940, not all the permanent quarters were ready. In the meantime, some officers had to be housed in town in apartments or hotels. A few stayed in converted cabins. The first ground crews who arrived in September 1940 were apparently housed in temporary barracks. Enlisted men from other units, such as the 4th Infantry, were quartered in temporary barracks beyond the horseshoe area.¹²⁴

The commander's house (1048) was one of the first set of quarters to be completed, followed by officers' family housing (1047), NCO quarters (1049, 1051), and the BOQ, bachelor's officers' quarters (1045). Post adjutant Lt. Marvin Walseth and his wife Phyllis moved into the family quarters in March 1941. Phyllis wrote home to family that "Nothing I can say can possibly tell you how nice they are for Alaska."¹²⁵ She described the cream-colored row house as having hardwood floors, a living/dining room, kitchen, three bedrooms and two baths, with electric appliances in the kitchen and a beautiful stainless steel sink. Shared facilities included a laundry room, play room, and store room in the basement. The Quartermaster provided some but not all of the furnishings. The Walseths considered themselves lucky to have the unit. Only seven were available but there were 16 married officers assigned to the field. The others had to remain in town. As it turned out, however, married officers were only allowed to live on

¹²⁴ Air Corps Capt. Clyde Sherman rented an apartment in town. He remembered waiting every morning for a car that picked up officers from town and brought them in to Ladd. Invariably someone in the group would be delayed, causing them all to arrive late. Clyde Sherman interviewed by Margaret Van Cleve, 15 February 1991, UAF Alaska and Polar Regions Department Archives. His remarks appear to refer to events in the fall of 1941. "55 Soldiers and Officers Arriving by Train Today for Ladd Field Air Corps," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, 21 September 1940.

¹²⁵ Walseth information from "The Flying History of Major Marvin Walseth," unpublished compilation of letters between Marvin and Phyllis Walseth and family members. Courtesy Steve Dennis.

the base with their families for a short time. After the United States entered the war, military dependents were ordered to leave the Territory.

The Air Corps barracks for enlisted men was located in the south wing of a multiple purpose building that would eventually also house the PX, theater, and hospital. It took somewhat longer to complete than the smaller officers' and NCO quarters. Eventually this barracks could house 250 enlisted men. Today the building serves as Post Headquarters.

In October 1941, a visiting Air Inspector described the condition of Ladd's barracks. He was impressed with the permanent quarters. "The new permanent buildings nearing completion...are the best I have ever seen. There is little doubt that morale of troops living therein will be materially improved." Others agreed, recalling that the permanent quarters were "first class."¹²⁶ New recruits and new arrivals at the field were frequently housed at the Air Corps barracks while awaiting assignment to quarters. Stan Jurek remembered arriving there with the 6th Air Depot Group in July 1942 and being very favorably impressed. "[I]t was the best accommodations we had from the time I started in the service...it was really a pleasant surprise." Temporary barracks, not surprisingly, were less comfortable. "The temporary barracks already completed and occupied are extremely drab," the Air Inspector reported. "Steps should immediately be taken to improve the appearance of the interior of barracks, recreation facilities and mess halls."¹²⁷ Whether that was ever done is not known, but as more troops arrived at Ladd Field, more and more men were assigned to temporary quarters.

New areas of temporary quarters sprouted up as Ladd expanded during the war, until Ladd could accommodate 4,555 uniformed personnel. One of the first areas to be constructed was the Coast Artillery Garrison located near the river bend southwest of the runway. Eventually, temporary quarters also existed north of the runways on both sides of the horseshoe, in what were then zones 100 and 200, southeast of the airfield in zone 900, southwest of the airfield in zones 300 and 400, and westward in zones 500 and 600 near today's main gate and Glass Park. These temporary quarters included Quonset huts, Pacific huts, 800-series (CCC-style) barracks, Loxstave barracks, and Theater of Operations (T/O) barracks.¹²⁸

Each type of barracks had its own characteristics. The 800-series barracks, described in contemporary records as "CCC type" buildings, were prefabricated wood panel structures similar to wood frame construction with drop siding and tar paper roofs. Thirty of these barracks were built at Ladd, measuring 20 ft by 120 ft. Each could house 40 men. Another 800-series barracks was built to house 245 personnel and was constructed with several wings. Loxstave barracks were constructed from pre-fabricated kits of notched lumber with built-up walls. Only three of those were in use at Ladd, housing only 16 men each. T/O barracks were constructed from rough lumber and were intended to be among the most temporary of the wartime buildings. Ten of these were in Ladd's inventory. Most of them, like the CCC type barracks, measured 20 x 120 feet and housed 40

¹²⁶ Milton Ashkins, questionnaire.

¹²⁷ Col. Edmund W. Hill, Air Inspector, memo to Gen. Arnold, 28 October 1941. University of Alaska Anchorage Archives, AAC Historical Files collection, series III, f12.

¹²⁸ "Air Transport Command Construction," MHR, Jan. 1945. Although available records do not show precisely where each type was located, plot plans and diagrams indicate the footprint of buildings on the base, and several aerial photos provide further details. See Appendix D for examples of plot plans.





Figure 63. Pacific huts with connecting wood frame building, Zone 100. May 1944. AAF photo, courtesy Russ Sackett.

men. One T/O barracks was completed in March 1945 to house the Women's Army Corps (WAC) squadron of approximately 150 women. This building was a U-shaped two-story barracks with a one-story rear section containing kitchen, mess hall and day room. It was lost to fire only a few months after completion.

Quonset and Pacific huts featured prefabricated sectional units with arched sides and roof. The main distinctions between the two types were in materials. Quonsets were

manufactured primarily from metal, while Pacific huts employed more plywood. At Ladd, Pacific huts predominated: 184 of them were used as barracks, compared to 35 Quonsets used for that purpose. Records also list another 27 civilian huts but their style was not identified. It was common to see groups of three huts connected to a central wood frame building which contained the coal stove.



Figure 64. Interior of a barracks hut. Zenas Richards collection, University of Alaska Anchorage Archives.

When Bill Stroecker first enlisted at Ladd in May 1942, he quickly rose to the rank of buck sergeant and was assigned to barracks on the North Post. "To begin with when it was simply the post," he recalled, "why I lived up in a special room for sergeants.... It was the best quarters in the whole barracks. Everybody else was out in the bay. After a while there got to be more staff sergeants, in fact they were still out in the bay [although] they outranked me. So they made a big issue out of it. The fellows I was living with, staff and techs... they preferred me being in there so they put up a big fight and I never did move! Until I got transferred to the 6th Air Depot Group and then the

accommodations weren't quite so luxurious." His new quarters were Quonset or Pacific huts in the 300 zone, southwest of the airfield. "There wasn't much, just simply bunks and a place to pass the time," he stated. He remembered that the coal came up from the...coal mine outside of Healy. "[S]ome of that coal was so wet and full of clay and the fumes from that...I remember being so sick inhaling those fumes 'cause there wasn't good ventilation. But it was better than a tent." He kept such things in perspective, though, in the spirit of the times.

Stan Jurek was quartered in the huts west of the horseshoe. He remembers that the huts in that area were scattered in the woods and housed a dozen men each. "It was just a cot and a place to hang your rifle under the bunk. Little shelf to hang a few of your clothes." He remembered, "Ours was named Pneumonia Gulch, next one was Snake Pit, and they were all really pretty cold living quarters in the wintertime." The men had to pay someone in the group to take a turn staying awake at night to make sure the fire didn't go out in the potbellied stove.



Figure 65. Inside Russian NCO quarters. Kay Kennedy Aviation collection, 91-098-868N, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Figure 66. Russian and American enlisted men in chow line. Kay Kennedy Aviation collection, 91-098-867, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

“[W]ithout somebody tending that fire,” he recalled, “we’d freeze in those buildings. So we chipped in [to] keep one guy...stoking the fire, so the fire wouldn’t go out.” He also remembered problems with the coal they were using. “Coal seemed like it was half dirt,” he recalled. Winter offered one other difficulty. “We’d have to scrub, [the]...wooden floor, I remember, and we’d have to take buckets and scrub the floor, and it turned to ice before you got it mopped up!.... Yeah, kind of tough keeping them clean in the wintertime.”

In most cases, mess halls were located in separate buildings in the barracks compounds. Officers’ quarters and a few of the larger barracks had their own mess facilities. Randy Acord lived in the BOQ, which had a mess hall in the basement where Russian officers also took their meals. Acord remembered that

the food was excellent. Stan Jurek remembered that the meals served out of the main Air Corps barracks were “first class.” As one would expect, though, food quality varied at the different outlets and was not always praised. However, Bill Stroecker observed that

[Y]ou were in the spirit of the war, you know, and you know what all the boys are going through all over the world, so things like the food and things like that weren’t as important as they would be to some civilian who was missing the better things in life. Because there was a war going on, everybody was aware of it. Most of the guys, most of them, understood all of that.

Russian personnel were also quartered at Ladd Field. They were given quarters in one of the NCO barracks on the North Post, today’s Bldg 1051. They shared mess facilities with the Americans, though most reports describe them as eating separately on one side of the hall. Women interpreters were housed in the nurses’ quarters. Officers were housed in town. The Soviet commander and his entourage stayed at the Noyes House on Illinois Street, which gained a reputation as “a big party place, evidently.”¹²⁹

Civilian Housing

When Ladd was first constructed, there was no civilian housing planned for the installation. H.O. Williams remembered, “They ran busses from downtown to pick up the people.... We walked down to Old Main School and caught the bus there at 8th and Cushman. There was no housing. The Corps of Engineers civilian who was supervising the surveying and all that lived in town.”

Many of Ladd’s civilian workers were local people, but plenty of others arrived in Fairbanks needing accommodations. In town, hotels such as the Pioneer, Nordale,

¹²⁹ Interview, Irene Noyes. The house was Richard Osborne’s family home before and after the war, and he remarked that the house was “trashed” by the Russian occupants. Correspondence, Richard Osborne, 12 September 2002. Thelma Walker recalled that parties at the house were luxurious, with lots of food and wine. The partying could be intense, apparently, but “Alaskans were no slouches; we could keep up.” Phone conversation with author, 19 August 2003.



Figure 67. Aerial view looking east June 1945. Zone 400 in foreground, zone 300 in center, south runway in upper left. AAF photo courtesy Randy Acord.

and Arctic filled up with workers. Additional housing for men was located at North Camp, near today's Trainer Gate Road and the Old Steese Highway. At first women were provided housing at the Pioneer Hotel and later in quarters known as Slater Camp or Slaterville. Mrs. Jane Drebaum, who worked at Ladd for a year when she was just out of high school, lived at the Pioneer Hotel. She recalled that the Air Corps stationed a military policeman in the hotel lobby to keep male visitors away from the women's dormitory area.¹³⁰

Later in the war civilian men were housed in barracks similar in some respects to those occupied by the servicemen. Quonset huts, Pacific huts, and Stout houses were used for civilian quarters. Stout houses were 16-foot-wide huts built of prefabricated wood composition panels. They had pitched roofs and walls which were sometimes covered with tarpaper. Records

showed that 45 of them were used at Ladd, in 36-foot lengths. Over 1,300 civilians could reportedly be quartered on the base.¹³¹

Reindeer Camp became one of the civilian housing areas. It was located to the west of the Coast Artillery Garrison and the 300-zone military housing area. Today a new hospital is under construction near this site. Richard Frank stayed in the civilian Quonset huts at Reindeer Camp before he joined the Air Corps and departed for the Pacific. There were individual Quonset huts for living quarters, he remembered, and "Quonset huts put together for the kitchen, and...reading room and all that." He explained, "You had to walk from one place to another, to the laundry rooms, shower facilities, and then the bathrooms."

Buzby's Camp also provided food and lodging for workers at Ladd during the early years of construction. It was located outside the original boundary of Ladd Field on part of Bob and Tiny Buzby's Chena River homestead. Later, this area was incorporated into the base. None of these facilities remain today.

Clothing

Winter clothing was another aspect of life at Ladd Field. Bill Stroecker described an early coat known at Ladd as the DVG. "All of the original Ladd Fielders, before the 6th Air Depot got here, wore what was called the DVG. It was a beautiful sheep-lined coat, parky, and it was called a DVG after Dale V. Gaffney, the colonel. Everybody was issued one of those DVGs. The foot gear was a knee length boot made of the same material, sheepskin, it had sheepskin outside. It was a common thing; I wish I had saved mine, it's a collector's item these days! But after 6th ADG came, why then, all of that individuality of the old Ladd Field base just disappeared."

¹³⁰ Correspondence, Mrs. Jane Drebaum, 13 June 2002.

¹³¹ Construction records noted that there were 27 ten-person Quonset/Pacific huts for civilians and another 45 five-person Stout houses being used. MHR, January 1945, appendix "Air Transport Command Construction." Capacity for civilian housing was given as 1,360. MHR, January 1945, 23.

Living Near Ladd

Evolyn Melville and her young family lived on a piece of land in Derby Tracts, just northeast of town near the railroad spur that crossed into Ladd Field. At that time, the Derby Tract neighborhood and the Hamilton Acres area to the east were home to only a few families, but as Ladd grew, so did the neighborhood. “A lot of people that came to Ladd Field as servicemen stayed on and made homes in the area,” Mrs. Melville recalled, “and a lot of them are still here.”

Proximity to Ladd Field influenced neighborhood life. Railroad access cut right through the residential area, as it still does today. Trains came through with supplies for Ladd on a regular schedule. But when trains were not running, neighborhood people used the tracks. Mrs. Melville remembered, “We spent a lot of time wandering up and down the tracks, those of us that lived out in the area. There were several of us that had small children, and we’d do a lot of walking along the tracks. There was also a road of sorts that paralleled the tracks, and it went out and crossed the bridge across the Chena between the rails, for people that wanted to take that method of getting out to Ladd Field to go to work.”

In addition to being near the railroad access to Ladd, people in the neighborhood were also in its flight path. “One of my fondest recollections – the way our house was situated, we were in the landing pattern for aircraft going into Ladd Field. The flights of aircraft, A20s and other craft would come in over Birch Hill and they’d go right over our house into the landing pattern for Ladd Field. Our young son was out in the yard a lot, and his first word was ‘Airplane.’ ’Cause that’s what he heard and saw all those first months....”



Figure 68. Gaffney attired in a DVG. Detail from group photo in Figure 17. Kay Kennedy Aviation collection, 91-098-854, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Pilot Randy Acord recalled that the sheepskin didn’t work as well for the aircrews who spent most of their time in stationary positions inside aircraft. “Our first clothing we had here was the sheepskin, and it was cold, very cold,” he reported. “So Gen. Gaffney got involved in this quite a bit, and he had some suits made out of down, filled with down for insulation, and they covered them with a light material and quilted them...that improved tremendously but we still needed more improvement.” He explained, “The original down fill that they had the quilting over wasn’t heavy enough. You’d snag it on the least little thing, and then you’d start losing feathers out of it. So they then took the same piece of material and covered it with a medium weight ducking, you know, heavier material, and they waterproofed that before it was all made.” The suit continued to evolve and improve. “Originally, you only had the zipper here like a pair of coveralls,” Acord stated. “Then later on, they put the zipper on the legs, because it was so dad-gum difficult to get your pants down that other leg, you know, without pulling them up to your knees. So that was the first three zippers, one on each leg, and one up the center. And that was our key pretty much til the end of the war, and then they started putting zippers all over everything, pockets and all.” Removable hoods were also developed for the suits. “[T]hat was a terrific idea,” Acord reported. The prototype was similar to a hooded vest, while later versions snapped onto the garment in the back.

Acord also described the rayon gloves which the men wore inside their outer mittens. “They issued us little tight-fitting rayon gloves, little brown ones. Fantastic. [You] could stick those...into a pair of mittens and you could warm your fingers up in a couple of minutes. But if you had to do anything, you’d take your hand out of the mitten, and your fingers wouldn’t stick to the cold metal. And you can go ahead and do nuts and bolts and all that kind of stuff without any danger, and put your hands back in your mittens.” Protection provided by rayon or cotton inner gloves was extremely important for mechanics who had to reach into small spaces and handle cold surfaces. While the gloves were not warm, they protected exposed flesh from cold metal. Before these gloves were issued to the men, instrument mechanics from the Cold Weather Test Detachment had regularly lost skin off their fingers while performing their duties in cold temperatures. “Every mechanic at Ladd Field has experienced this loss,” noted the 1942-1943 detachment report.¹³² When temperatures dropped below minus 20 degrees, the gloves made it possible to increase the time a mechanic could work between warm-up breaks from three minutes to fifteen minutes.

In some cases, local recruits reported shortages of official military issue garments and temporarily relied on their own winter gear to fill the gap.¹³³ Paul Solka wrote that after being sworn in at Ladd, “We were taken to supply and issued outdoor clothing ordinarily worn by the corps: two sets of winter underwear and two coveralls. The rest would be issued in a month.” When Robert Redding enlisted in December 1942, there still wasn’t enough cold weather gear, and the men wore their own hats and boots. Frank Nigro remembered starting out the first days of his December enlistment without gloves. That problem was addressed, but later, while training on the firing range at 38 below, his feet got painfully cold in the military issue combination of shoes and overshoes. The next day he fixed the problem by leaving the shoes in the barracks and going out to the range with his feet wrapped in gunny sacks from the kitchen and then inserted into the overshoes.

Entertainment and Recreation

As Ladd Field grew, so did the efforts to welcome and entertain the servicemen and transient civilians who were stationed there. Both the community and the armed forces stepped in to provide soldiers with leisure activities. A USO club was built downtown, and local civic organizations sponsored dances, socials, and tea parties there. “[J]ust about all the young girls in Fairbanks were recruited to come to the USO to dance and talk with the young men,” Josephine Johnson recalled. “The older women in Fairbanks would preside over that and they would see that there was food and everything was on the up and up!” There were also events at other community venues. Mrs. Johnson recalled dances at the Moose Hall. “Every Saturday night they had big dances down there. They had bands and everything. And that’s pretty much where the young girls and GIs and stuff went on Saturday night and danced up a storm! And where you met other people, where everybody met, and not only the young people went there, everybody in town used to go there. And the older people would sit up in the bleachers and watch. That’s the way it was, that was our entertainment.”

¹³² RCWTD, 311.

¹³³ Paul Solka, “In Service,” *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, 1 October 1995, H-11. Redding, “Battle of Ladd...,” H-6. Interview, Frank Nigro with Margaret Van Cleve, 17 August 1993, Oral History collection, UAF Rasmuson Library.



Gates, Passes, and Pins

Civilians needed passes to get onto Ladd Field, while servicemen needed passes to go into town. Bill Stroecker remembered that working in headquarters could have its advantages when it came to acquiring passes. “So one of the main things that you’re interested in was getting passes, to get off of the base. There was one funny thing happened when I was in headquarters. We had a real compact group, you know, we had all been friends before getting in the Army, most of us, and the problem was trying to get passes, to come into town. Sometimes they were lenient, and other times they were tough and it was hard to get a pass, and they allotted you only so many passes.” He remembered that his friend Dick was in charge of document reproduction. “And they happened to leave a pass in reproduction, so he ran off a whole bunch of them. And then [a friend] said, ‘Dick, sign,’ and he signed his name and compared them; they were almost exactly the same as those signed by the officer.” After the passes were used, they were routed back through the same message center, so it was easy to avoid detection. “When they came back through, Dick would just pull out the passes that he’d [made.] We did pretty well for a while!”

Civilian Access Pins



Figure 69. Ladd Field permanent pass, courtesy Augie Hiebert.



Figure 70. Contractor pass, courtesy Kenneth Bailey.

Fairbanks, of course, had a rougher side. The airbase construction and wartime operations had brought literally thousands of people into the community, with all the attendant activity. A local writer described Fairbanks as “a town where the hotels were overflowing, the bar business was brisk, and the boom was in full swing by any measure.”¹³⁴ Second Avenue, which boasted bars, cafes, and shops, was busy, as was Fourth Avenue, which offered a different sort of action. Even visiting celebrities could get caught up in the nightlife. Members of the Bob Hope troupe, visiting on a USO tour, were spotted one night at the Graehl Bar, partying until the wee hours.¹³⁵

On Ladd Field itself, there were a variety of sponsored activities, especially later in the war. These ranged from organized team sports to USO performances to libraries, movie screenings, and Red Cross activities. There were service clubs available for enlisted men, NCOs, officers, and Russian officers.¹³⁶ On occasion, clubs sponsored music and dances. The NCO club, for example, sponsored monthly events in the fall of 1944, offering buffet food and dancing to the music of Arthur Auer and the

Melody Ladds.¹³⁷ Ladd Field also boasted its own weekly newspaper, the *Ladd Field Midnight Sun*.

The Special Services Division sponsored events such as the Halloween Carnival of 1944, held in the post gymnasium. “The spirit of Halloween and Mardi Gras will reign for a night,” the *Midnight Sun* promised. “A thrilling basketball game, a star-studded variety show and a roaring and rollicking circus midway are a few of

¹³⁴ Cole, 127.

¹³⁵ Irene Noyes interview, 28 June 2002.

¹³⁶ See chapter 5 above for info on Russian officers’ club.

¹³⁷ “Non-Coms Dance at Club Tonight,” *Ladd Field Midnight Sun*, 13 October 1944, 1.



Figure 71. WACs and dates at NCO club, 1945. Courtesy Audrey Virden, fifth from left.



Figure 72. Carnival photo, Ladd Field *Midnight Sun*.

the features planned....”¹³⁸ Organizers arranged concessions and booths with a circus theme. They had a “dump the sergeant” booth, a miniaturized display of Ladd Field, a rifle range operated by the MPs, and a dime-a-dance concession offered by the Slater Camp women. “Dance and whirl with a Slater Girl” was that booth’s slogan.

Organized intramural sports were popular and received full coverage in the sports section of the *Midnight Sun*. Teams were formed along unit lines. The basketball schedule

looked almost like a unit roster for the airbase. ATC Squadrons, Ordnance, CWTD, AACS, Medics, Signal, Resident Engineers, Quartermasters, and the Railway Battalion fielded teams. Even the base band showed up to provide music for tournament finals.¹³⁹ Ladd also fielded a boxing team for tournaments. Servicemen could also enjoy skiing and ski lessons on the slopes of Birch Hill. The Red Cross ran a ski hut offering coffee and doughnuts to skiers on weekends. The Ladd Athletic Office also sponsored a touch football league, and the base offered a baseball field, track, bowling alleys and weightlifting rooms. Volleyball, badminton, and ping pong tourneys were open to officers, enlisted men, and Russian personnel.¹⁴⁰ Vice President Henry Wallace, traveling through Ladd Field in May 1944, joined in a special volleyball game pitting a U.S. team against Russian players. It was reported that in his enthusiasm for the game, the Vice President hogged the ball, but no one was going to argue with him.¹⁴¹

The USO brought visiting celebrities to entertain at

Ladd as part of their regional tours of Alaskan and Canadian bases. Screen actress Ingrid Bergman paid a call. Comedian Joe E. Brown traveled through in 1942. So did Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna. They performed in a show with musicians Frances Langford and Tony Romano, with Ladd Field’s own big band providing the backup. Movie star Olivia deHavilland arrived in



Figure 73. WAC softball team, July 1945. Because there were few women’s teams to compete with, the Wacs sometimes played against the men. Courtesy Betty Wiker.

¹³⁸ “Carnival Plans are Drawn,” *Ladd Field Midnight Sun*, 27 October 1944, 1.

¹³⁹ “Hoop Eliminations End Nov. 1st,” *Ladd Field Midnight Sun*, 27 October 1944, 5.

¹⁴⁰ “Ladd Has Several on Ring Team,” “Ping Pong, Badminton Scheduled,” *Ladd Field Midnight Sun*, 10 November 1944, 5.

¹⁴¹ Cole, 130.

Everybody Remembers Bob Hope

More than any other celebrity to visit Fairbanks during the war, Bob Hope sparked memories. His name arose spontaneously from many of the people who wrote and talked about Ladd Field. Marie Haggard, who was one of those who met him, summed it up: "Bob Hope, there's only one Bob Hope." She recalled that, "He can communicate with anybody, and people would enjoy his personality to the point where he just overflowed with joy because they were enjoying him." Aspiring performer Audi Kay Johnston-LeVang danced with Hope at a club dance, talked Hollywood with him, and remembered the evening as "an unforgettable intriguing 'once in a lifetime' experience..."¹⁴²

April 1944 and made personal visits to all the servicemen who were patients at the station hospital in today's Bldg 1555. Heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis stopped by in May 1945 to referee a boxing match at Ladd. That event drew 3,000 onlookers from the base and the Fairbanks community.

A group of soldiers at Ladd got together in their off-duty time and formed their own big band, performing dance music of the era as well as the occasional military performance. Two of the musicians, Bill Stroecker and Stan Jurek, reside in Fairbanks today. Stroecker remembered that they had a twelve-piece band playing standard arrangements of the day. "The band... for being remote and just being volunteers, was pretty presentable," Stroecker said. Jurek recalled that they started out playing at the officers' club and went on to play for squadron dances and at venues around Fairbanks, calling themselves the "Northern Aires." Jurek remembered, "There wasn't enough room at Ladd Field, so we'd hold our dances up at the University gymnasium.... We'd play about every Saturday night." As volunteers in the band, the men were excused from extra duty like KP, at least for a while. The

dance band tradition continued in the later years of the war as well, with Ladd ensembles performing bi-monthly at the Eagles Hall, and playing for Saturday night dances at the BOQ and Wednesday night engagements at the USO.



Figure 74. 557th AAF Band plays at a War Bond rally in Fairbanks, spring 1945. Rex and Lillian Wood collection, #2002-164-95, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

By 1945, the 557th AAF band had been formed to handle formal performances at military occasions. This group played for VE Day celebrations, War Bond rallies, the Memorial Day parade in Fairbanks, and for visiting dignitaries. When Soviet Foreign Commissar V.M. Molotov's entourage came through Ladd on their way to the San Francisco Peace Conference, the band was preparing to welcome them with an incorrect rendition of the Soviet national anthem. At the last minute, a Russian officer realized the error and hurried over with a copy of the proper anthem. The band scurried around preparing an arrangement of parts and succeeded in avoiding an embarrassing moment.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Interview, Marie Haggard, 30 July 2002. Correspondence, Audi Kay Johnston-LeVang, 30 July 2002.

¹⁴³ MHR, April 1945.



Armed Forces Radio

A Fairbanks commercial radio station, KFAR, became the Armed Forces Radio Service outlet serving Ladd Field during WWII, as part of the military's effort to provide entertainment to service members stationed at distant outposts. Through the Armed Forces Radio Service, KFAR received national programming that was previously inaccessible to the Fairbanks audience.

Augie Hiebert remembered how it worked. "[W]e had these big sixteen-inch transcriptions that were flown up here with NBC's best programs, Red Skelton, Jack Benny, all that stuff. CBS stuff, Mutual stuff, and ABC stuff. And we had a marvelous program service that, of course, the townspeople enjoyed too. Now these programs didn't have any commercials in them. All the commercials were deleted because they didn't want to figure that the government was subsidizing advertising. But it was wonderful programming for both civilians and the military. We did that through the whole war."

Although the programs were not broadcast live, the audience was delighted to be receiving the same shows as the rest of the nation. "[T]he programming from the networks just made people realize they were getting the same programs that the folks at home were, of course on a delayed basis. We could do delayed basis; it still was entertainment. And the locals liked that a lot too," Hiebert recalled.

Ladd Field Chapel



Figure 75. North Post Chapel, ca. 2000. USAG-AK CRM photo.

The North Post Chapel was completed in 1944. It is a wood frame chapel, built from the 800-series A-M standard plans which reflect a New England meeting-house style. It was available to various denominations for services and could seat about 240 people. The building was deactivated as a chapel in 1973, but following renovations in 1988, it was reopened. It is presently not in use.

The Ladd Field Midnight Sun



How's Your Russian?

See Page 3, Column 1.

Base Band Broadcasts Thursday

BASE THEATER



PAULETTE GODDARD
SONNY TUFTS

"I LOVE A SOLDIER"

As the long winter season stretches out it is expected that more G.I.'s will become interested in taking part in shows of all types. A few weeks ago an excellent dramatic radio script was received through Army News Service and because of its timeliness was produced in short order by the Radio Section of the Special Service Office. The script titled "The Ruhr" was a geographical and historical survey of this famous center of German war industry. At the very time that KPAR listeners were tuning in the program Allied troops were assaulting cities in the Ruhr Valley.

The cast pictured above all managed their parts very well. Left to right they are Lt. David Chavchavadze, Cpl. Martin Kloogak, C. Ensor Stoddard, Sgt. Al Urbach and Sgt. Eddie Feldman.

Squadron A Winner Of Post Prize

Soldiers In Two Units Honored

Girls Rule Leap Year USO Dance

Squadron G Are Grid Champions

TALENT TRYOUTS

— For —

"Holiday For Fiends"

A Variety Show to Be Presented
At The Ladd Field Carnival

On October 31

Will Be Held

TOMORROW AT 5 P.M.

— In The —

POST THEATER

WANTED

Actors - Actresses - Singers - Vocal Groups - Musicians
Composers - Writers - Comics - Dancers - Single Acts
Doubles - Specialties - Etc.

G.I. and CIVILIAN
MALE and FEMALE

If you can't make it we still want you.
Call 206

Figure 76. *Midnight Sun* headlines collage, fall 1944.



Fig. 77. Seder service, 1943. Robert and Jessie Bloom collection, 1963-0089-00134, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

An Influx of People

The construction and operation of Ladd Field brought thousands of new people into Fairbanks, and offered opportunities and challenges to the population already living in the area. Men and women, Native Alaskans, sourdoughs, miners, young people on their first job, tough old hands working construction, Russian officers and enlisted men, as well as civilians, soldiers and airmen from all parts of the United States came together in their varied assignments at Ladd Field. An influx of people and activity on this scale had not been seen since the gold rush that founded Fairbanks. However, one major group was not

present. At that time, military units were segregated, and African-Americans were not represented in the military units at Ladd Field, though that changed several years after the war.¹⁴⁴ No specific information was located on other ethnic groups taking part in civilian or military activities at Ladd, although anecdotal information suggests there was a variety of people, regions, and influences represented.

Guide to the Last Frontier

The War Department produced an informational booklet introducing servicemen to Alaskan geography, history, people, and outdoor pursuits. A *Pocket Guide to Alaska* told soldiers that “you are getting something most Americans would give their eyeteeth for—a close-up of America’s last frontier in action.” Local recruit Robert Redding remembered the booklet years later. “Outsiders were informed as to the best way to handle us. We were a proud people, the booklet said, a bit prickly, but with proper attitudes nobody should have problems....The booklet had lots of information about Alaska, such as its economy. I learned a lot about us from it.”¹⁴⁵



Figure 78. Cover of soldiers’ pocket guide.

Alaskan Richard Frank enjoyed talking to the newcomers from the lower 48. “I know I did a lot of visiting, talking to people there. Most of them were from the lower 48 so it was interesting speaking to them, what they were doing in their past lives. Some of them were farmers and some of them worked in the factories, and that’s something we don’t have up here.” Not only did the newcomers bring different experiences, they also brought different voices. “One of the most interesting things that I noticed at that time was speaking with different people from different areas. We never talked to someone from the hills of Kentucky or Tennessee, and all that. They had different accents; that was new to us. Like from the eastern seaboard, they had a different accent, and people from down south had a different accent, so it was interesting talking to these people.” He remembered that, “Pahk the cah” and “y’all” were things they didn’t hear in Fairbanks before that. “Southern drawl was something that was pretty neat,” he recalled.

¹⁴⁴ No African American units were known to have served at Ladd during the war, although three regiments served on the construction of the Alaska Highway.

¹⁴⁵ Redding, H 5. War Department, Army Information Branch, *A Pocket Guide to Alaska*, Washington, DC 1944.

Alaska was a territory, and the military considered it overseas duty. Some people who were sent to Ladd during the war considered Alaska a cold and distant outpost when they arrived. Some simply served their assignments stoically, waiting for the day they could transfer out or return home. Others were pleasantly surprised by the Alaskan lifestyle, and many of these returned after the war, establishing homes and families in Alaska. This trend continues among service members to the present day.

Marie Haggard worked in the real estate business in Fairbanks after the war. She observed that when some of the men left Ladd, they were already planning to return to Alaska after their discharge. There was just one catch. Wives and dependents had not been allowed to come north with the troops during the war years. "The men wanted to live there, whether they could get their wives up there or not was the question!" Mrs. Haggard recalled. "They would try to entice their wives up with the beauty of the country."

Stan Jurek was one of the servicemen who returned to Fairbanks. "I was going to the Frozen North," he thought when he first heard about his assignment to Ladd. "Turned out it was the nicest place you ever did see. Just wonderful, with all the daylight. When we got here the second of July, that was really a treat. Beautiful country. I wanted to get out and stay here (after the war), but my orders for some reason were cut and dry, and I had to go back to the States." He came back a few years later, "and I've been here ever since. God's country. Really beautiful."